

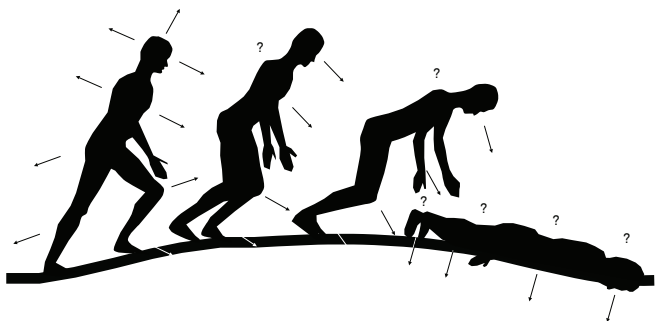
THE FUNAMBULIST PAMPHLETS
VOLUME 08



ARAKAWA + MADELINE GINS

Edited by Léopold Lambert
March 2014

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THE FUNAMBULIST PAMPHLETS
VOLUME 08: ARAKAWA + MADELINE GINS
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INTRO

TOWARDS AN ARCHITECTURE OF JOY

My regular readers might find peculiar that I spend so much time on a specific practice of architecture, as I am usually approaching architecture by more indirect means. The *Reversible Destiny* Foundation created by Shusaku Arakawa and Madeline Gins is, however, much more than an architectural practice. It articulates art, philosophy, poetry, architecture and, to some extent, science in a dialogue that benefits each of these disciplines and ultimately serves one of the most radical ideas that apply to architecture: the action of non-dying. There has been a lot of misunderstanding concerning this manifesto and that is why I do not write the word *immortality* and prefer to it the active process of *non-dying*, in other words, the perpetuation of life. The vitality promoted by the *Reversible Destiny* Foundation is one that is fundamentally centered on the body and its undiscovered “talents.” For this reason, I very often associate their architecture with the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, as he refuses any form of negativity in the construction of an ethics of joy for which the body attempts to continuously compose harmonious relationships with its environment in its “perpetuation of its being.” Such a positivity is at the core of the work done by Arakawa and Gins, which acquires a political dimension where the body tentatively (a word they often use) reduces its condition of being a subject.

01

ARCHITECTURES OF JOY: A SPINOZIST READING OF PARENT + VIRILIO & ARAKAWA + GINS'S ARCHITECTURE

[also in *The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 1: SPINOZA*]

In the middle of the 17th century, Baruch Spinoza revolutionized theology by proposing a tremendous change in the definition of God. Departing from the classic transcendental vision of a God creator, he introduced an immanent vision of God creature. Some architects might stop their reading of Spinoza's *Ethics* here and consider the whole theory as foreign to their practice. However, this immanent theology envisions the world in such a way that it can inspire creation of architecture, what we will call, an architecture of joy. The first part of this short essay will attempt to concisely envision Spinoza's *Ethics*, the second will present the difference between joyful affects and sad affects, and the third and last will try to construct relationships between this philosophy and the architectural projects designed by Claude Parent and Paul Virilio in the 1960's on the one hand, and those built by Arakawa and Madeline Gins in the last ten years on the other hand.

Spinoza envisions God as the infinite substance composing the universe. This substance is an infinite amount of infinitely small parts which develop external relations with each other and thus compose bodies. The ability of those bodies to

maintain the effort of persisting in their own being is called *conatus* and composes the essence of things. These bodies have the ability to encounter and affect each other and thus increase or decrease their power of action. Given the above, we can observe that Spinoza is not only a rebel against religion but also against the paradigmatic philosophy of his century, i.e. the Cartesian philosophy. In fact, in the second book of his *Ethics*, Spinoza demonstrates the following proposition: the human mind does not perceive any external body as existing, except through the ideas of modification of its own body. In other words, a mind knows itself only *via* the encounter with other things, which is in complete contradiction to Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," in which a mind knows itself by thinking. Spinoza, on the contrary, could have stated something like: "I encounter, therefore I am."

Spinoza distinguishes four modes of perception in his *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding*. In order to focus on the proposed topic, we won't even evoke the first one, "arising from hearsay". In fact, in his lecture at the University of Vincennes about Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze – who appears between the lines in this essay- does not even talk about this first mode of perception that he calls kinds of knowledge. These three remaining modes of perception are the following:

- The first one is empirical. It implies only the experience of shock between the extensive parts of respective bodies and thus provides what Spinoza calls inadequate ideas. In order to illustrate this mode, Deleuze uses the example of the wave. In the first mode of perception/knowledge, one can only experience the shock of the wave against one's body. In other words, it provokes a knowledge of effects without a knowledge of causes.

- The second one is both empirical and rational. It involves the composition of relations between the bodies. In the illustration of the wave, one can position one's body in such a way that the relations of the wave compose in a harmonious way with the relation of one's body.

- The third one is strictly rational. It implies a perception of the essence of a thing or, following what we wrote earlier about the essence, the understanding of the mechanisms of perpetuation of a body in its being. It is an understanding of causes and thus it can be defined as adequate ideas.

The purpose of this essay probably becomes clearer and one can distinguish the role that the second mode of perception can play in architecture. However, it is still too early to evoke this question as the *Ethics* itself has not been yet deployed.

We have established Spinoza's theology/cosmology and different modes of perception of it; nevertheless, the second part needs to examine what makes Spinoza call his book *Ethics*. In fact, one of the reasons for his *Cherem* (excommunication in Judaism) from the Jewish Community is that Spinoza establishes a fundamental distinction between religious morality and individual ethics. Good *versus* evil, both determined transcendentally, are replaced by good *versus* the bad, determined by whether there is accordance or discordance of relations between parts composing bodies.

As Deleuze explains in his class, when I have an encounter such that the relation of the body which modifies me, which acts on me, is combined with my own relation, my power of acting is increased. This encounter that increases the power of acting is defined by Spinoza as good; he calls it Joy. As a corollary, any encounter that tends to destroy the relations of one's body is considered bad for this body and is called

Sadness. Just as Spinoza decided to keep religious terminology (God) in order to show the revolutionary content of his philosophy, he uses creationist religious example of the Original Sin in his demonstration in order to deactivate what used to be the paradigm of a religious morality. He affirms that Adam did not do an evil act when he ate the apple, but rather he did a bad act as the relations of the apple were not composing well with his own relations. What is described in the Bible as a divine interdiction to eat the apple is nothing else than Adam's instinct that the apple may be poisonous for his body.

Since joy results from harmony of relations between two bodies, joy can be said to be the motor of the persistence of the parts in their being. We have already seen that this persistence is called essence by Spinoza, but it also matches his notion of desire, also called appetite. This notion is central to my discussion, as it implies what action is required for the concerned architecture to be activated and to be legitimately considered an Architecture of Joy.

Having stated these principles of Spinoza's *Ethics*, we can now begin to evoke the two architectures we proposed to investigate in this essay.

The first one is the work of the association between two French architects, Claude Parent and Paul Virilio between 1963 and 1969 under the name of *Architecture Principe*. In 1964, they established an architectural manifesto that can be summarized by an action of tilting the ground that replaces the paradigmatic assemblage of horizontal plans with vertical ones. They call it the Oblique Function.

If we apply a Spinozist reading to the Oblique Function, we can observe that the first mode of perception is necessarily

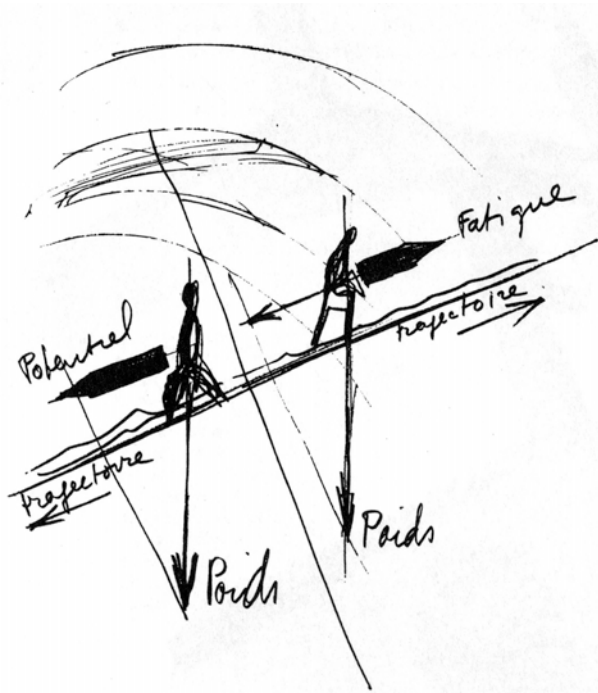


Diagram for the Oblique Function by Claude Parent (1964)

occurring as gravity forces the bodies' parts to interact with the architectural surface's parts. However, as opposed to architectures which proceed only with flat floors, in the Oblique Function, gravity imposes an additional effect on the bodies: a directionality. In fact, any movement of the body in any direction will exercise on it a degree of acceleration. This acceleration will be negative if the body attempts to climb up the surface and it will be positive if the same body attempts to go down the slope.

If for the sake of the argument we accept to consider the effects of a flat surface on the body as negligible, we ob-

viously cannot do the same for the Oblique Function's effects. In fact, a negative acceleration imposed on the body creates a fatigue on the body whereas a positive one triggers an exhilaration. One could thus hastily argue that only half of the potential movements on this surface provides a Spinozist joy while the other half provokes sadness. However, this affirmation would be inaccurate, since the body in action, while conquering slope is expressing its power of existence. Here, we use the word conquest in the same way as Deleuze when he talks about the conquest of colors by Gauguin and Van Gogh. This leads us to think that comfort and joy are not synonyms. We might even wonder if they are not antonyms.

In that sense, the experience of the Oblique Function, requires the exercise of the second mode of perception. On this tilted surface, a body can only persist in its being if it manages to compose harmoniously its relations with the relations of the surface. That is how we can affirm that Claude Parent and Paul Virilio manage to create an Architecture of Joy in the Spinozist sense of joy. The Oblique Function is only a manifesto, but it is interesting to observe the work -- mostly by Parent -- that has been built based on those principles:

- The Villa Drusch in Versailles (1963)
- Sainte Bernadette Church in Nevers (1966)
- The French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (1970)
- Claude Parent's apartment in Neuilly sur Seine (1973)

The second architecture to which we apply a Spinozist reading is the work of Arakawa and Madeline Gins. In fact, despite the fact that their work, similar to many other radical architects, has been categorized by critics as having more to do with art than with architecture, their production is probably the best achievement of a Spinozist architecture.

In order to illustrate this point, we have to start by evoking the notion of the Architectural Body developed by Arakawa and Gins. In fact, in their research on the interaction between the human body and the architectural environment, they establish this notion as a symbiosis of those two entities. The Architectural Body is thus an entity in which the second mode of perception is continuous. Placed in a state of disequilibrium as in Arakawa and Gins' architecture, the human body keeps re-harmonizing its parts in relation with the architectural parts and thus develops a conscience of its direct environment. Via this process of harmonization, the body learns and becomes both stronger and more skillful.

That leads us to the main purpose of such an architecture for Arakawa and Madeline Gins which consists in an adamant refusal of death. In accordance with the 18th century French physiologist Xavier Bichat who stated that life is the totality of functions that resist death , they undertake to architecturally train the body against the continuous degradation of human tissues.

One could not be more wrong to associate this enterprise with the Modernist belief for potential healing characteristics of architecture. Indeed, what Arakawa and Gins call *Reversible Destiny* is an absolute refusal of modernist comfort that triggers a process of weakening of the body and decreases its power. On the contrary, their architecture challenges the body, puts it in danger and leaves it without any other alternative than to react to this delicate situation. In this regard, this architecture is profoundly anti-paternalist and clearly possesses some emancipative characteristics. It releases the same Spinozist freedom as when he writes that "a thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone".

Spinoza describes death as the change of belonging of a body's parts to another body. The parts do not persist in their being anymore and they start to populate one or several other bodies. The goal of Arakawa and Gins is therefore to maintain this persistence as long as possible via a continuous conquest of joy, as we have been defining it earlier in this essay. Describing the conditions offered by the Bioscleave House (Life Span Extending Villa), Madeline Gins offers this evocative sentence: "Every day, you are practicing how not to die."

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes that no one has hitherto laid down the limits to the powers of the body, that is, "no one has as yet been taught by experience what the body can accomplish solely by the laws of nature, in so far as she is regarded as extension." Thus, he asks a fundamental question that can be formulated this way: What can a body do? The question that the Oblique Function and the *Reversible Destiny* ask is not different in any way. Acknowledging their common ignorance with Spinoza, these radical architects attempt to create an environment dedicated to the Spinozist Joy, the condition for the beginning of an answer to this question.

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02

APPLIED SPINOZISM: ARCHITECTURES OF THE SKY VS. ARCHITECTURES OF THE EARTH

[also in *The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 1: SPINOZA*]

I would like to oppose a Spinozist architecture to its antagonist. It is important to observe that attributing the status of 'Spinozist' to an architecture is a relatively artificial and subjective designation. All architectures do, to some varying extent, celebrate the composition of material assemblages that will interact with the bodies they host. Nevertheless, just as I did for the cinema of Kurosawa in the preceding chapter, I want to point out some architectures that express the essence of Spinoza's philosophy with more intensity (another Spinozist term) than others. Moreover, these others seem to express an essence that can be interpreted as an opposition to Spinoza's philosophy. I designate this antagonism as Architecture of the Sky vs. Architecture of the Earth. One could argue that the sky is fully part of Spinoza's philosophy, at the same level as the ground; however, here the sky has to be understood through two attributes: a symbolic one that understands the sky in a theological way, and a "practical" one in the sense that what is called "architectures of the sky" would not challenge the body in a direct physical manner. We could use two other antagonist notions to define this conflict: the transcendental vs. the immanent.

ARCHITECTURES OF THE SKY ///

Architectures of the sky involve the body in its vision and its ability to feel the negative space created by their proportions. They are built in such a way that the body is humbled, small as it is under the mightiness of the sky materialized by the roof. For this reason, it is a theological architecture and its paradigmatic example is the Gothic Cathedral in the way it expresses the fear and respect of a transcendental God. Although it does not necessarily appear as such, the Milan Trade Fair Building designed by Massimiliano & Doriana Fuk-sas, is also a theological architecture. Of course, it is not dedicated to “God,” but it celebrates a form of deity embodied by the architect. The image of the “vortex” viewed from above is engaged in a direct dialog with the famous photograph of Le Corbusier’s finger that became the symbol of the transcendental architect’s action on the world. It is as if the Architect (with a capital A) pressed the roof of the Trade Fair with his (the Architect is always involved in normative processes of masculinity) finger and thus transformed the space below it and magnified his intervention. The plan is the architect’s medium but it is also the symptom of his deity. He traces lines and laughs to see all these little bodies trapped in the spatial apparatuses he drew from above.

ARCHITECTURES OF THE EARTH ///

I apologize for using the same examples when I invoke the question of an architecture that truly challenges the body but they are so paradigmatic that using other (and probably tamer) illustrations would not serve the argument as well. Those examples are the Oblique Function elaborated by Paul Virilio and Claude Parent in the 1960’s and embodied in various buildings, the life work of Arakawa and Madeline Gins to create *Reversible Destiny* architecture for its users, whose ob-

jective is to reverse the process of aging and death, or the various playgrounds of the world including the fantastic one in Belleville designed by BASE. In those three cases the architecture is mostly generated from the surface with which the body has no choice but to interact, as we continuously touch it: the ground. The latter is treated as a terrain (we might say, the original status of all grounds) that the body needs to “conquer” (to re-use the Deleuzian terminology for Spinozist concepts) in order to appropriate it.

What is truly Spinozist about this architecture is the fact that one is forced to develop the second degree of knowledge (the one that makes your body compose harmonious relations with your physical environment) that can ultimately flirt with the third one (a perfect reading of the material assemblages in their movement of speed and slowness). The outcome of such a conquest is an increase of power (*potentia*), hence the joy to which I was referring in the original text. The joy is quite literal in the case of the playgrounds, but in the case of the work of Arakawa and Madeline Gins, this increase of *potentia* goes as far as aiming at a significant reduction of the aging process (manifested by their poetic *We Have Decided Not To Die*) by strengthening the body and its biology through architecture. In a society of idols and comfort that serve the exact opposite purpose, we absolutely need more architectures of Spinozist joy.

Photographs by the author, except for p. 22: photograph by Hiroko Nakatani (December 2011).

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03

ARCHITECTURE OF THE CONATUS: “TENTATIVE CONSTRUCTING TOWARDS A HOLDING IN PLACE”

[also in *The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 1: SPINOZA*]

If persons are sited, why do philosophers inquiring into what constitutes a person, or, for that matter, into the nature of mind, rarely, if ever, factor this in? Philosophers considering persons as sites would be obliged to develop a person architectonics. They would, I am afraid, have to turn themselves into architects of sorts. (Madeline Gins and Arakawa, *Architectural Body*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002, 5.)

This chapter's title, *Architecture of the Conatus*, refers to Madeline Gins's and Arakawa's book *Architectural Body* in an association with Spinozist philosophy. For Spinoza, each assemblage of substance i.e. body, “as far as it lies in itself, strives to persevere in its being” (*Ethics*, part 3, prop. 6). In other words, each thing will be continuously involved in a process of effort to keep the integrity of the material assemblage that constitutes it. Any animal (humans included), for example, will keep its body together as long as the latter is involved in the vital process. When this animal dies, however,

its body will decompose and its matter will be reassembled in other bodies (soil, etc.). Arakawa and Madeline Gins present a similar concept in their book.

Arakawa and Gins calls Architectural Body a composition of a living material assemblage constituted both by the human body itself and its direct environment. Just as for any body, such an assemblage integrates the movement of the matter within it (think of human body's biology). The Architectural Body also involves the biological and other microscopic movements of its elements' matter; but to this microscopic scale, the Architectural Body adds a macroscopic one in which the human body continuously composes material relations with its environment. Note how Arakawa and Gins use the noun person as a verb in the following passage:

Close observations have yet to be made of the effect of type of habitation on persons. Those who would minutely observe the effect of habitation on human beings must begin to discern how and why surroundings give or withhold from organisms of the type that can person the means to behave as persons. Even as the concept of person can stay put (everyone knows what a person is), it needs to be greatly dilated (particularly within a book entitled Architectural Body). We have adopted the admittedly clumsy term "organism that persons" because it portrays persons as being intermittent and transitory outcomes of coordinated forming rather than honest-togoodness entities; now that we have launched the term, we use the following less cumbersome terms synonymously with it: body, body-proper, human being, organism, organism-person, person. When studying what goes

on between the bodyproper and its surroundings, it will be necessary to consider the extent to which persons are behavioral subsets of the organisms from which they emanate and out of which they compose themselves as agents of action. (Madeline Gins and Arakawa, *Architectural Body*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002, 2.)

A taking shape of surrounds and bodies and organisms and persons occurs intermixedly. Logic would want to get in there with a knife and cut them apart. Although we are utterly dependent on the force of logic prior to constructing the surrounds that will test our hypotheses, we will say no to logic and resist making incisions and separating the probably inseparable. All the linking and enclosing, an it (think of this as an autopoietic system if you like) that starts as enclosed and then goes about enclosing itself—all of that needs to be picked up as an organism-like whole, kicking and screaming, alive with process, emphatically, and urgently rushed into a supporting context of embedded procedures. (Madeline Gins and Arakawa, *Architectural Body*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002, 4.)

Going back to the notion of conatus, Arakawa and Gins introduce their concept of bioscleave, that can be interpreted as the Spinozist notion of substance, as the universal (theological for Spinoza) ensemble of matter and its internal energy. Rather than the Spinozist necessary perfection of the substance, Madeline Gins and Arakawa talk about the balance of the bioscleave without which, no vitality can be developed:

Bioscleave—people breathe it, it sustains them—has parts and elements, many of which exhibit an order, even as it presents itself as an enormously confused mass with operative factors that cannot be distinguished. Who moves through this mass of chaos, this massive mix of order and chaos, has sited awareness buried there within it. (Madeline Gins and Arakawa, *Architectural Body*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002, 51.)

Start by thinking of architecture as a tentative constructing toward a holding in place. Architecture's holding in place occurs within and as part of a prevailing atmospheric condition that others routinely call biosphere but which we, feeling the need to stress its dynamic nature, have renamed bioscleave.

All species belonging to bioscleave exist only tentatively (which remains true whatever turns out to be the truth about natural selection, whether it happens randomly or with directionality), with some species, all things being unequal, existing on a far more tentative basis than others. Additionally, bioscleave stays breathable and in the picture only so long as elements take hold of each other in particular ways, only so long as there can be a cleaving of a this to a that and a cleaving of a this off of a that. So that there might be new and different link-ups, fresh points of departure, ever renewed tentative constructing toward a holding in place, a firm and definite taking hold, which gives one sense of the term to

cleave, must also readily entail cutting apart, cut-off, relinquishment, the other sense of the term. Should a crucial element fail to hold its own, bioscleave would go missing, collapsing into untempered atmosphere, leaving (but no one would be there to tell) an uninhabitable planet in its wake. A single missing element (carbon or oxygen) or an aberrant formation of a molecule, to say nothing of a large-scale cataclysmic event, could make bioscleave vanish, bringing an abrupt end to millennia of tentative constructing toward a holding in place. (Madeline Gins and Arakawa, *Architectural Body*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002, 48.)

The last excerpt introduces the particular notion of tentative constructing toward a holding in place (very close to the Spinozist definition of the *conatus*) or, in the excellent French translation by Monique Chassagnol, *construction tâtonnante en vue d'un maintien en place*. The word “tâtonnante” used by Chassagnol conveys, in my opinion, an even more expressive meaning of the Architectural Body than the English word tentative used by the authors. *Tatonner* in French incorporates the notion of tentative but adds to it the idea of groping, a highly corporal idea. One might remember Madeline Gins’ book *Helen Keller or Arakawa* (Santa Fe: Burning Books, 1994) including the famous deafblind author in their discourse. This makes a lot of sense as the Architectural Body involves only limited visual and auditive characteristics compared to its hyper-tactility.

One of my first experiences when I visited the Bioscleave House in October 2011 was to use a blind cane and go around the house’s central terrain with closed eyes. It helps understanding how one could acquire more and more ease

experiencing the terrain “only” (but there is no “only” here) with one’s feet. By doing so, one composes a more balanced architectural body:

Staying current with bioscleave, remaining alive as part of it, involves keeping pace with the tentativeness it brings to bear, staying focused on the elusiveness as such of this tenuous event-fabric or event-matrix. Everything is tentative, but some things or events have a tentativeness with a faster-running clock than others. So that there can at least be a keeping pace with bioscleave’s tentativeness, it becomes necessary to divine how best to join events into an event-fabric, which surely involves learning to vary the speed at which one fabricates tentative constructings toward holding in place.

Architecture occurs as one of many ways life sees fit to conduct and construct itself, a form of life, and all forms of life have, without doubt, as of this date, but a limited and uncertain existence. Even so, thus far only nomads have held architecture to be as a matter of course tentative.

Life—Bios—would seem to be constituted by interactions between tentative constructings toward a holding in place, with the body, the body-in-action, surely the main fiddler at the fair. Bodily movements that take place within and happen in relation to works of architecture, architectural surrounds, are to some extent formative of them. Those living within and reading and making what they can of an architectural surround are instrumental in and crucial to its tentative constructing toward a holding in place. We do not mean to

suggest that architecture exists only for the one who beholds or inhabits it, but rather that the body-in-action and the architectural surround should not be defined apart from each other, or apart from bioscleave.

I would like to introduce an excerpt where Gins and Arakawa are directly addressing the reader asking her/him to complete a small assignment that can work in any space where (s)he reads the book. They go as far as making the reader actively enter the narrative, since (s)he speaks in the text. The assignment consists in rotating the room where the reader currently is by ten degrees to increase her/his awareness of the physical space surrounding her/him. The extreme manifestation of such an imaginative space can be found in the Ubiquitous Site – Nagi Ryoanji, built in 1994 in Japan, which concretizes the same assignment, except that it is no more 10 degrees of inclination but the infinity of degrees between 0 and 360, since the floor is cylindrical.

Contribute your room, your architectural surround of the moment, to this text. For your room to be of use in what follows, it needs to be transformed into a work of procedural architecture. Note where in the room you are and the direction in which you are facing. To have this room—the room in which you happen to be reading this—stand out distinctly as the room it is, select and keep vivid a representative group of its features. Now take the room and give its floor a ten-degree tilt along its longest length (if the room is square, either side is fine). Make a double of your room thus tilted and place it next to the original. Seesaw the floor of the double so that it ends up tilting in the opposite direction.

ARCHITECT: We have now been in both rooms.
It is apparent that the two together frame the impact on us of an architectural surround, that is, of the room in which you are reading this text.

READER: I lean differently into the situation of exactly this room within each of its exemplars.

ARCHITECT: Perfect.

Following photograph is courtesy of the *Reversible Destiny* Foundation (Ubiquitous Site - Nagi's Ryoanji - Architectural Body, 1994) in Arakawa and Madeline Gins, *Reversible Destiny We Have Decided Not to Die*, New York: Abrams, Inc., 1997.

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04

ARCHITECTURES OF JOY: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO PUZZLE CREATURES [PART A]

The following interview is divided into two parts. The first one is an epistolary exchange between Madeline and myself informed by two face to face conversations. The second is a discussion we had in the Bioscleave House designed by Arakawa + Gins and completed in 2008 in the Hamptons:

1. Léopold Lambert: 18th-century French physiologist Xavier Bichat stated that life is the ensemble of functions that resist death. If we consider this axiom, death is a continuous process, and not a punctual event, whereas life is the tension between this process and a form of active resistance against it. Many people seem to believe that when you state “We have decided not to die,” you imply the ‘killing’ of death. On the contrary, my understanding of your work leads me to see you as engaged in a continuous struggle against death thanks to a relationship to be forged between the body and its direct environment. Does it seem correct?

Madeline Gins: The puzzle creature known as Léopold Lambert makes a correct assumption. Puzzle creatures need to figure out what goes on as them. Not succeeding in figuring that out equals, by my lights, having to remain a mere mortal. Xavier Bichat, whose death at the ripe-old age of

thirty-one, from a fever that supposedly came on as a result of a bad tumble down a flight of stairs (Wikipedia entry), should most obviously be attributed to Ignorance, a much ignored leading cause of death, delivered up a useful enough rallying call [WE HAVE IN LIFE AN ENSEMBLE OF FUNCTIONS THAT RESIST DEATH! or BY PERFORMING YOUR ENSEMBLE OF FUNCTIONS YOU WILL STAVE OFF DEATH! or ACTIVELY RESIST DEATH THROUGH THE ENSEMBLE OF FUNCTIONS YOU LIVE AS!]. Unfortunately, to this day, both living and dying remain unfathomable. How can the viable—us—be kept viable?

Those composed of tissues of density — Bichat was the first person to distinguish and name bodily tissue! — have their own bases of operation — ensembles of functions — that need further looking into and, yes, further architectural guidance and support. Bichat's statement suggests the further need, when it comes to staying alive, for large and small efforts to be made by an organism on its own behalf, for there to be a cascade of death-resisting efforts, and I conceive of the arduous task of staying alive in these same general terms. I think back to Bichat's great contemporary, French philosopher-psychologist Maine de Biran, who, if I remember correctly, made sure to take the environment into consideration in his explication of human effort [*La Psychologie de l'Effort*, 1889]. Yes, Procedural Architecture prompts a puzzle creature to go about continually making an endless slew of efforts to stay viable. It also prods her to keep in sight her puzzle nature, an array of solution-defying qualities, her conundrum status.

Each organism that persons (Not every organism that persons will succeed in forming a person!) lives as a puzzle creature to herself/himself. How does a puzzle creature manage to walk and talk? Or, for that matter, how does a puzzle

creature nestled within the universe manage to effuse voluminously out a distinct world of ample volume, a world within which to move about?

Filmmaker Nobu Yamaoka, who has lived for an extended period of time within a work of Procedural Architecture (Mita-taka Lofts, Tokyo) and has made two films about this type of architecture, *Children Who Will Not Die* and *We*, reports that each time he slept in his loft's sphere room, he dreamt of explosions, exploding-open. This strikes me as important evidence. Evidence of what you might ask. Evidence of the ongoing cleaving (bioscleaving) of the puzzle creature and of the gradual exploding-out of the sentient volume ("voluming") that is, is and is a puzzle creature's all and everything. Evidence, then, of the Architectural Body (Definition: Body Proper plus Architectural Surround) that Arakawa and I suggest be used, instead of the body proper, as the minimal unit to be taken into consideration when trying to determine what lives as a human being.

Procedural Architecture relies on twenty or so architectural procedures that directly address, four-dimensionally of course, much of what is puzzling about human nature and the universe at large. Discouraging with, through and across human puzzles, addressing living puzzles on the brink of becoming posthuman/transhuman, this architecture is set up to bring into evidence what could otherwise most probably not have become apparent.

Procedural Architecture prompts a puzzle creature to figure out the puzzle she lives as, to make note of what in every respect happens as her. What a pity that until now the few who have been willing to try entering the puzzle to find possible solutions were mostly on their own. What an impossible task this once was, and what a different impossible task, a decid-

edly less impossible one, this inquiry into the daily enigma will become in an age of Procedural Architecture.

2. Léopold Lambert: One has to be careful not to consider the Site of *Reversible Destiny* – Yoro as a playground in the usual sense of the word; a place to play in for a while. Nevertheless, I think that the word playground has to be kept for Yoro in Constant Nieuwenhuys' sense of it, the space of the Homo Ludens who adopts a playful behavior as his/her main occupation. This reading allows me to ask if you are interested in proposing, along with a general resistance to death, a different way of life that would primarily focus on what you call the construction of the Architectural Body?

Madeline Gins: Architecture that presents itself procedurally to people helps them take note of their architectural bodies. Architecture as usual could not care less about the architectural body, sadly enough. Why sadly? Because each of us does form (read: co-form) a huge extended body in respect to, and as-if joining up with, what surrounds her. So that we can begin to fathom ourselves as creatures, we must at least strive for some degree of accuracy when trying to determine how far each of us extends out into the everywhere that is bioscleave. In recognizing how extensive we are, we grow more grand, less pitiful and less defeatist, and more self-reflective body-wide. Yes. Procedural Architects generally put the emphasis on the architectural body, but they also construct into their works the means for balancing out several different types of world-constituting procedures. Arakawa and I present these world-constituting procedures in a forthcoming book, *Alive Forever, Not If, But When*.

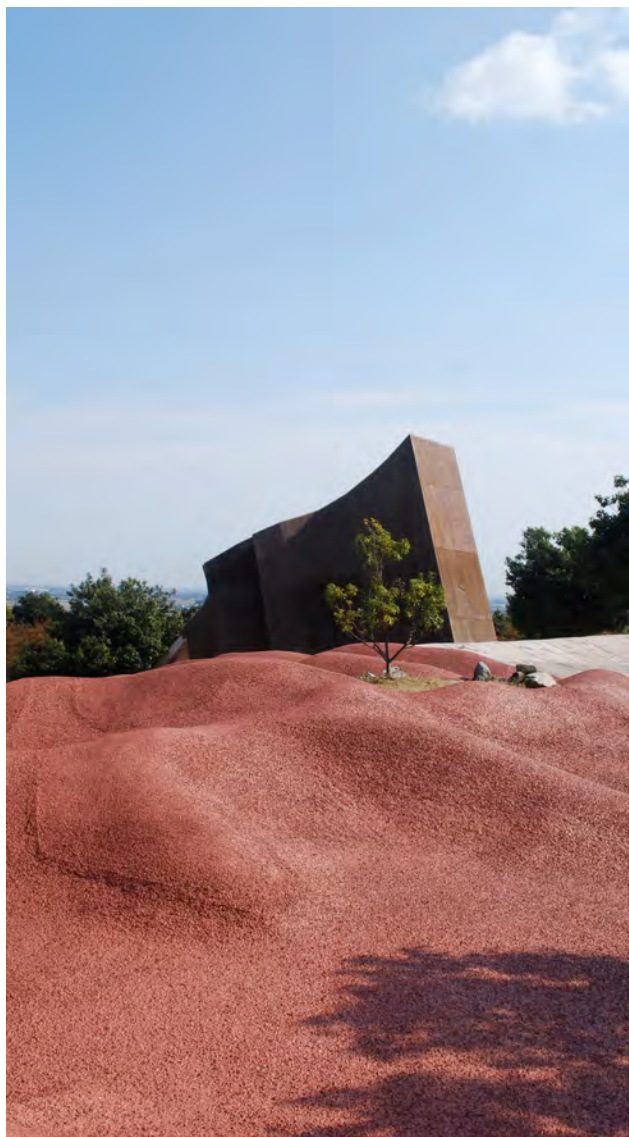
Following photographs are courtesy of Trane Devore

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Originally published on November 8th 2011







05

ARCHITECTURES OF JOY: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO PUZZLE CREATURES [PART B]

Interview recorded at the Bioscleave House (East Hampton) on October 16, 2011:

3. Léopold Lambert: Let's consider the place we are in: Bioscleave House—Lifespan Extending Villa. I don't think that we should hold back from using the word playground when speaking of it. We should just attribute a particular meaning to this word, the same meaning I was getting at in my previous question (see the second question of part A).

Madeline Gins: The term “life-invention playground” comes to mind.

4. Léopold Lambert: Where playing is living, not a side activity but rather a way of living in itself. Where living equals playing.

Madeline Gins: Yes. We are playing very bravely here today within Bioscleave House consistently being brave for hours at a time by continually not denying the convoluted and ominous mystery we live as. This house has been organized in such a way as to keep that vivid for us.

5. Léopold Lambert: You are saying, I gather, that this architecture actively triggers certain types of thought and behavior. Then I guess it is not by chance that we both thought it would be important to finish this interview in this place.

Madeline Gins: Yes. This house has incorporated into it a set of architectural procedures that prompt us to hold ourselves suitably open for what can come to occur as us. For what comes tumultuously, 'semi-tumultuously' and pointedly to occur as each of us. That which moves and thinks puzzle creatures, populating the many I's each of us brings forth, playing out in respect to particular social and physical circumstances, suggests itself (itselfes!) to be through and through playful, does it not?

6. Léopold Lambert: You are speaking to someone who has been lucky enough to experience this house, but how would you begin to describe Bioscleave House to someone who has never stepped inside it?

Madeline Gins: As if speaking of playing in a playground could ever be compared with actually playing in one. People should enter Bioscleave House and wholeheartedly give it a try. We have in it, I have recently begun to claim, a new scientific device, one for determining what forms forth as us. A structure of this nature ought to be available to everyone. All puzzle creatures should live within Procedural Architecture, within puzzle-solving works of architecture. Designed for out-in-the-open perusing of the automaticities that run and drive a puzzle creature, works of Procedural Architecture engage this self-enigma in an active discourse about modes of operation. Just like that, upon beginning to move about within such a work, the self-enigma, the thoroughly puzzled one, becomes able to observe and explore, and even to re-route and augment, those automatic processes and procedures

that move her as a marionette and “ventriloquise” what she speaks.

I have gradually been introducing you in the course of this interview to the concept of Procedural Architecture, but now that you are within an example of it, and as you begin feeling what distinguishes it from architecture as usual... Help me convey to others how Procedural Architecture works by describing your before and after; how your experiencing of Bioscleave House brings this concept, if you permit me to pun away, home to you. We need to pool our evidence in this regard. Prior to Procedural Architectural methodology, no method existed for collecting in place (all in one place) for review the many initiatives or trajectories through which a person constitutes (read: co-constitutes) her world, and unhurried reflection on the how and what (composed of what?) of person-environment interactions was close to impossible. It has at last become possible to study what a person forms forth as in relation to her surroundings. For centuries, trajectories (of who knows what) and interactions — dispersals of human wherewithal — just happened and happened and happened, and that was life. Life simply went on happening to happen. But now going forward, now that it has become possible to make a cast of (to collect in place) what happens forth as us, we can even begin to compare one moment in the stream of events with another, and that should make it possible for Procedural Architectural methodology to be used to determine which surroundings, in our (Arakawa + Gins) lexicon, architectural surrounds, will be most conducive to the greatest longevity.

7. Léopold Lambert: I was going to add that this house is a hymn to gravity. Everything here expresses a poetry of gravity in my opinion.

Madeline Gins: A hymn to the scales of action that serve up gravitational pull? Yes, if you like. A pulling up off of that pulling down. A pulling out and in and out and in. Arakawa found it amusing to say that we make our own gravity. I see this house more as being a hymn to our species' reconfigurability. For me, all incredible art, poetry, architecture from this moment going forward will lead an organism to reconfigure herself for the sake of viability (her own and that of others). The insanity of separatism, of individual art initiatives all going their separate ways, will end in favor of all makers striving together to figure out how to go about keeping human beings terrifically viable.

Have a look at the list of architectural procedures essential to a work of procedural architecture. We (Arakawa + Gins) derived this initial set of architectural procedures from the sixteen subdivisions of our art-science research project, *The Mechanism of Meaning*. The other day, distinguished artist-scientist and procedural architect-in-training, L. Brandon Krall, encouraging me to bring this list out into the world as a poster, put it this way: "Everyone should have the opportunity to know about Procedural Architecture. The Architectural Procedures Poster — what would you name this poster, I wonder — could be dropped from airplanes into every city on the planet."¹

8. Léopold Lambert: What I like about the way you use the word *reconfigurability* is the fact that you don't use it the same way a doctor would. We are not really talking about a state of disease that needs to be reconfigured into a normal state of health. In my understanding of the term, we are talking about a continual state of reconfiguring that never quite reaches a state of inertia; the body does not come to a state of rest.

¹ We look at a board on which all the architectural procedures that have driven the design of this house are written. See www.reversibledestiny.org

Madeline Gins: Hold on a minute, the state of ignorance human beings subsist in has got to be reconfigured as soon as possible. I count stubborn ignorance, much of it stemming from what might be called the “Being-Too-Damned-Sure-of-Oneself Syndrome,” to be the leading cause of death. All the pretending to know that goes on contributes to this major illness. That said, the requisite reconfiguring certainly ought to go on continually. I guess I am saying that, from my standpoint, and many critical thinkers agree with me about this, physicians suffer from the same deadly disease as their patients.

9. Léopold Lambert: Most architecture actually encourages this ignorance by serving up too much comfort. It leaves the body in a state of lethargy rather than making it work.

Madeline Gins: Eminent evolutionary biologist, Stanley Shostak, recognizes Procedural Architecture to be our species’ first serious attempt at devising the most suitable of all niches for itself. Thus far architects have ignored, or given scant thought to, the fact that each species has its niche and unfortunately have not sought to design that niche that could greatly prolong human life, the best of all niches that would maximally provide members of our species with a heroic means for survival. To repeat: Think of a work of Procedural Architecture (aka *Reversible Destiny Architecture*) as a new scientific device (a new art-scientific device?!) that you can use for reconfiguring yourself so that you can come to grasp what goes on and learn how to stay alive ongoingly.

Photographs by the author - exception page 47: photograph by Hiroko Nakatani (October 2011).

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06

DOMESTICITY IN THE *REVERSIBLE DESTINY'S* ARCHITECTURAL TERRAINS

Twice last year, I had the great opportunity to stay in *Reversible Destiny's* architectures. Along with good friends, we spent the last few days of 2011 at the Bioscleave House in Long Island, and more recently stayed over at the Mitaka Lofts in Tokyo. It is one thing to visit these architectures during the day, but quite another to actually stay there and therefore confront their uniqueness with our sense of domesticity.

The atypical dwelling that surprises and amazes you at first becomes a terrain of habits in a second phase. Your body does not need to find its right spot and position anymore, it knows the few places where it can form what Arakawa and Madeline Gins call an adequate "Architectural Body." Climbing a small "hill" to go to the bathroom or to the kitchen when you just woke up puts you in an interesting state of cautious somnambulism. Paradoxically, vision becomes less important in your understanding of space; or, rather, vision does not register anymore in a hierarchical scheme in which it commands the rest of the body, it becomes an equal part of the sharp awareness of the environment your body builds little by little. Moving in these architectures becomes a dance; not a ballet, of course, but rather something along the lines of Pina Bausch, where stumbling is part of a harmonious

movement celebrating the living. Your body is both fragile and strengthened when confronted with the risk to which it continuously needs to respond. An understanding is always (re)negotiated between this liberated matter and your body that, in this regard, is one step closer to fathom its own material properties.

In a more prosaic way, the Mitaka Lofts are inhabited by several people and the *Reversible Destiny* Foundation Tokyo office, and were therefore appropriated by a multitude of standardized, well known objects and furniture that considerably reinforce the uniqueness of their architecture. Whether it is the swing of the sphere room, the hanging dish-dryer, the small library organized here and there, or the Ikea-like desk in one of the square rooms, those objects produce a striking contrast both with their environment and the one that they usually occupy. The body is not alone in attempting to construct a harmonious relationship with the architecture: so are these objects, and the way of life that they imply.

By their very existence, these two buildings offer us the possibility to imagine bold and radical built architectures, possibility that we refuse to see on a daily basis as a form of excuse for our own production. As a response to the ambient dullness, the *Reversible Destiny* Foundation celebrates an architecture of joy.

Photographs by the author (October 2012)

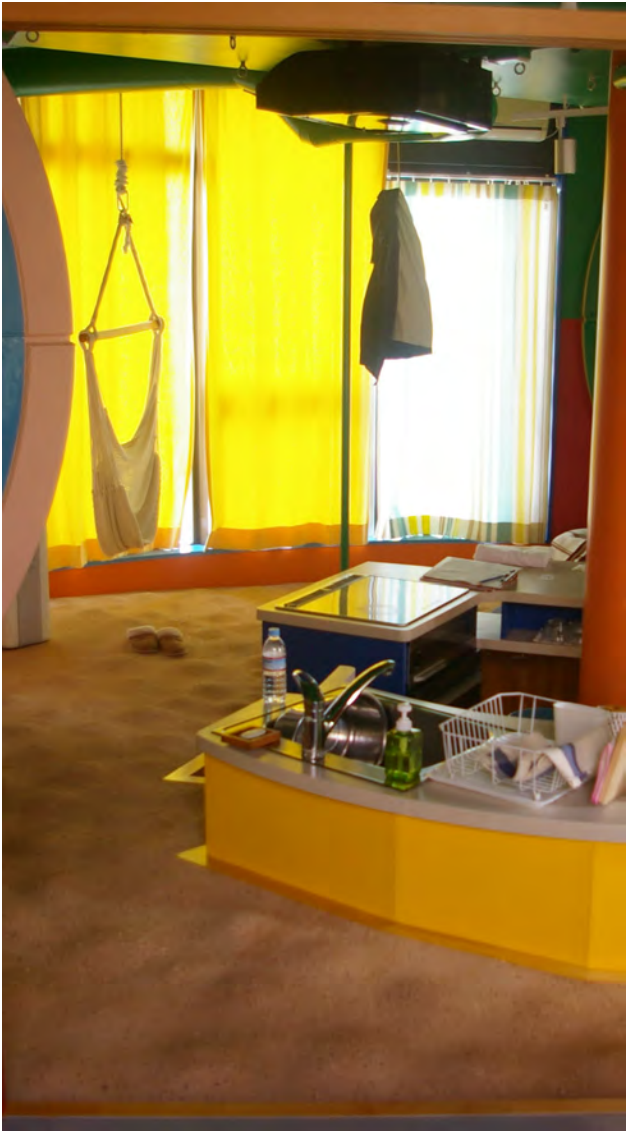
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Originally published on October 29th 2012









07

REVERSIBLE DESTINY LOFT IN ACTION: A TENTATIVE REPORT FROM A RESIDENT BY SHINGO TSUJI

When I visited the Reversible Destiny Foundation's Mitaka Lofts (see previous chapter) in Tokyo last year, I encountered one of its residents, Shingo Tsuji, who is also an architect (Chiasma Factory) and was kind enough to allow me to visit his apartment. Since then, we became friends, and I recently asked him to present a short account of the details of his life in this particular dwelling. I asked him to take some pictures of his apartment and point out a few significant details characteristic of his "reversible destiny" way of life. As you will see, the Reversible Destiny life is not as different as one might think from a more "traditional" way of life; nevertheless, the difference is crucial and definitely influences both the body and its behavior (mood, inspiration, aura etc.):

REVERSIBLE DESTINY LOFT IN ACTION: A TENTATIVE REPORT FROM A RESIDENT /// **by Shingo Tsuji (photographs included)**

"Interesting, fun, lovable, exciting ... but probably NOT livable!" This might be a good brief of typical comments from visitors to Mitaka Reversible Destiny Loft (or those who see it in pictures or on TV) in its empty state. It is true, but only in

a very limited sense: it may not be livable as long as you are caught up in a narrow — but, I have to admit, very strong — orthodox concept of a “house” (and, I should add, a “body”), which is actually nothing but a cultural and historical implant and not a universal idea (although many would argue that a physically simple and functionally clear-cut house is, no matter where and when, the most livable according to universal human attributes that are presupposed in, for example, fields like ergonomics, universal design and, above all, orthodox modernist architecture).

As a 4-year resident of the Loft and the only practicing architect living/working there, I would like to challenge the typical view on the livability of this particular built environment and, if I can go that far, even show that it’s more livable (in a particular sense of the word that Arakawa and Gins would have given to it) than a standard, square-cut, colorless houses with flat floors, walls and ceilings. As an awkward writer (no matter what language I use), however, I choose to show actual pictures of my room — formally named “Critical Resemblance Unit C” by Arakawa and Gins — in its living (i.e., not empty, inactivated) state with short comments, instead of writing a longer, yet perhaps less convincing counterstatement.

All the pictures below are casual snapshots of my Loft unit, or, I would say, a part of my Architectural Body — another term of Arakawa and Gins. As such, some of the scenes may look kind of messy – but I would be pleased if the readers take it as the evidence of livability in somewhat different sense than the word usually implies.

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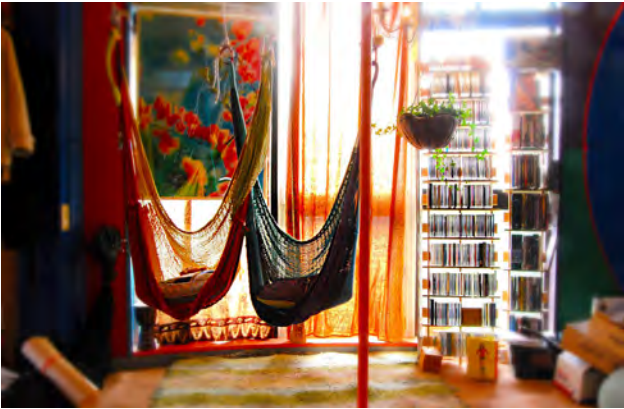
1/ INTERIOR VIEW

With its circular plan and panoramic openness — most of the exterior partition is composed of glass windows of various sizes — the room resets, or at least confuses, our ordinary perspective sense of space. The entire unit space — consisting of circular core with four attachment cells (two boxes, one tube and one sphere) around it — is not clearly divided according to functions, but loosely differentiated into overlapping zones. “After spending a few hours here, it somehow feels like looking inside my brain,” one of my friends said. According to another friend, “it’s a place you can never be really sad or angry.” I definitely agree with him.



2/ KITCHEN

The central core of the loft functions like a cockpit of the unit: whoever occupies it seems to take control of the air of the room almost automatically. It provides the best space for cooking, eating, working, reading, talking... that is, most of the things I personally do in my everyday life, and the good thing is I can do all these things here at the same time, which reminds me of the usage of traditional Japanese “chano-ma” (family room with tatami floor), which accommodates various daily events like eating, watching television, sleeping, etc., at different times of a day.



3/ LIVING ZONE (A KIND OF)

There was a sofa at this corner when I started to live here, but I always felt something odd about it. The feeling was gone when I replaced it by two hammock chairs, as it somehow liberated the space from a fixed function, making it more tentative and lighter. The exterior light comes in through the glass all around the unit for 24 hours a day (daylight during a day and city light during a night), helping to blur the atmospheric boundary of inside and outside.



4/ HANGING FURNITURE

The first challenge for anybody who decides to live in the Loft is storage space, since there is only a little flat ground to accommodate ordinary furniture and stockwares. Having moved in, a new resident soon finds that (s)he is provided, in Arakawa and Gins's grace, with countless eyebolts on the ceiling instead, which encourage us to use the ceiling (usually just a useless flat plane above your head) as a new ground to put our stuff on. As a result, the visitors will find lots of floating boxes, baskets and stuff hanging from above, many of which are as colorful as the Loft itself. Moreover, it's definitely much more fun to hang them than to place them on the ground!

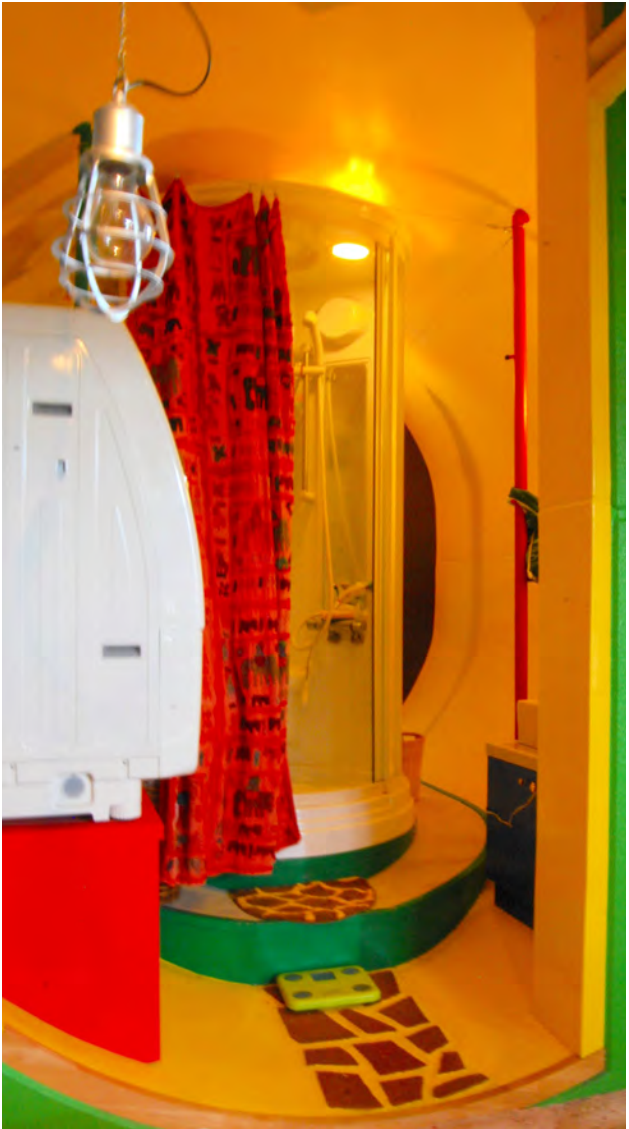


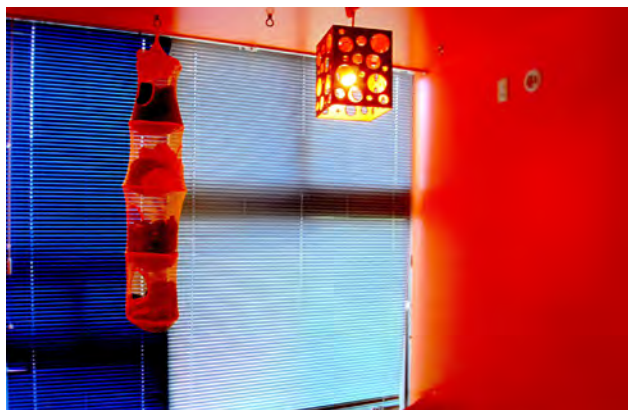
5/ BLUE SPHERE CELL

To be honest, the blue sphere room (officially called “the study”) remains the hardest to appropriate and the most attractive zone at the same time, even after four years of my residency. I occasionally enjoy reading or just relaxing here, but it feels like there’s something more I shall discover. I have to add that this is the place that where kids enjoy the most — without exception, they spend most of their time here on their visit — and show great dexterity in playing with it.

6/ SANITARY TUBE CELL (next page)

The green and yellow tube (the colors differ by unit) or the “reversed giraffe tube” (guess why) containing sanitary devices such as a washing machine, shower and lavatory units is, from a functional point of view, the most “fixed” space in the Loft. It takes some time to find a way to balance yourself in front of the washing stand (behind the green wall on the right) on the slippery rounded surface. After a few weeks of residency, however, it becomes almost like an instinctive movement for us residents.





7/ ORANGE BOX CELL (BEDROOM)

One of the reasons I chose this unit among a few alternatives (there were two or three vacant units when I applied) is this beautiful orange box. Textbook theory usually recommends soft colors with low intensity for resting space – but who cares? With this energetic orange as the first sight to jump in my retina every morning, waking up has become a kind of daily treat for me. Another thing I found is that housewares and items that would usually look uncool or almost stupid (like the lamp in the picture) look very good here, and perfectly fit with this colorful and shapeful Loft.



8/ BUMPY TERRAIN

The bumpy, undulated floor is the reason for many people to think this is not an easy, if not altogether inappropriate place to live in, even though all admit that is definitely a fun part of it. However, having moved in, you will be surprised how fast your body learns to adjust itself to the given terrain to a degree that you can move freely, even in the dark, without worrying about losing your balance. Interestingly enough, I still occasionally feel the presence of my sole and the floor as I walk, which never happens, of course, on usual flat floors. Kids are the fastest and the best learners, and it's interesting to see how some of them actually snatch the ground as they move around.

As a closing word, I should add that the pictures here just show my particular way of using, appropriating, playing and having fun with the Loft, and I know that the other residents have their own way of doing so, very different from one another.

08

A SUBVERSIVE APPROACH TO THE IDEAL NORMALIZED BODY

The oxymoron of an “ideal normatized” body expresses the paradox of the elaboration of a body that was supposed to represent a standard for all bodies but, by doing so, became idealized as no real body was, in fact, perfectly matching this standard. The following chapter constitutes an opposition between this ideal normatized body as drawn by Ernst Neufert, Le Corbusier and the Architectural Graphic Standards and its subversion within architectural projects.

The modernist project to establish a standard for the human body is not born in the 20th century. Renaissance was built around this notion of idealized proportions both for the body and architecture. In 1487, Leonardo da Vinci drew what remains one of the most famous drawings of Western Art: the Vitruvian Man. Many re-interpretations and parodies of this drawing have been created to address the question of standard since then.

In 1936, Ernst Neufert, one of the first student from the Bauhaus and protégé of Walter Gropius, creates an Architects' Data book which establishes a rationalization of the human (male) body and its direct built environment (furniture, street, building etc.) so that the latter perfectly adapts to the former. Once again this body exists only as the representation of a norm. His dimensions saturated diagrams have been never-

theless considered as a source of fundamental information in many projects since then. Nowadays, his book is still considered as the “bible” in some architectural schools.

Before going any further within the exploration of transgressive approach to the norm, let's re-establish what the latter constitutes. The paradigmatic example of the proportional rationalization of the human body is, of course, Le Corbusier's modulator which was supposed to embody a “range of harmonious measurements to suit the human scale, universally applicable to architecture and to mechanical things.” One has to observe that, despite the fact that Le Corbusier was working closely with the talented Charlotte Perriand, who complemented his architecture with her industrial design, the modulator is exclusively male and thus participates in maintaining a gendered domination of the standard in architecture. It is important, however, to notice the assumed idealization of this body in Le Corbusier's stylized drawing, which clearly represents a non-existing body.

In the second part of the 20th century, similar diagrams were collected in the successive copies of the Architectural Graphic Standards used as a reference volume by many architecture offices. The precision and illusory exhaustiveness of dimensioned combination of the body and architecture, however useful, elaborates an imaginary limited field of possibilities both for the body and its environment.

In 1974, American industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss reinterprets these normative diagrams by adding to them the gender differentiation as well as the acknowledgment that other bodies exist and respond differently to normalized environments. He even anthropomorphizes his two main models by giving them names: Joe and Josephine. The very idea of including wheelchair users, handicapped or elderly within

this mean of rationalization, however thoughtful and progressive, is problematic as it attempts to normalize what is, by definition, failing to respect the norm; that is the very idea of categorizing somebody as 'handicapped.' Nevertheless, it helps us to question further a potential transgression of the universality of the norm.

More recently, we could observe a new diagram of the human body in relation with its environment. The winning entry of the Phase Shift Park (Taichung) competition by Philippe Rahm architectes and Catherine Mosbach depicts the body not by its anatomical dimensions but rather by its biological relation to the environment. Heat, humidity and pollution, as three factors having physiological consequences on the body, are mapped and exploited in the creation of the park proposition.

The last example allows us to investigate two architectural attitudes that fundamentally refuse to dissociate the body from its environment and consider those two entities as a balanced assemblage subjected to universal forces, such as gravity or friction. No diagram in my knowledge illustrates such interaction better than the one drawn by Claude Parent for Architecture Principe's Oblique Function. Architecture is expressed as a single oblique line, experienced simultaneously by two bodies, one climbing up and therefore submitted to a fatigue from the action of gravity, while the other is subjected to speed while going down following a vector of movement inferior to 90 degrees with the weight vector.

The body of work that I often associate with Parent & Virilio's research is elaborated by Arakawa and Madeline Gins. Their research, more complex than the Oblique Function, deals with very similar issues. What they conceptualized under the name of *Architectural Body* is the absolute non-dissociation

of the human body from its environment that, when though as such, develops a form of symbiosis that resists death as a process. The following diagram maps the complexity of relation that the body continuously develops with its direct environment. Such ‘qualitative’ — Deleuze would say ‘intensive’ — approach is in direct opposition to Neufert’s quantitative research and therefore can acquire the universality that the inventors of the ideal normalized body claimed.



ARCHITECTURAL LANDING SITES

One finds how one's body is situated in the world through contrasting positionings of focal areas of perceptual awareness. Dashed lines show approximations of distances and dimensions, architectural landing sites.

■ kinaesthetic-perceptual landing site	■ tactile-perceptual landing site	■ visual-perceptual landing site	■ indeterminate area or non-landing site
■ kinaesthetic-imagining landing site	■ tactile-imagining landing site	■ visual-imagining landing site	

Excerpt of the book *Reversible Destiny We Have Decided Not to Die* by Arakawa and Madeline Gins (New York: Abrams, Inc., 1997.)

In this student project, “L’homme, mesures de toutes choses,” Thomas Carpentier subverts the normalization of the body by proposing a series of other standards whose bodies, fictitious or real, clearly imply a different approach in the conception of architecture. With a humorous tone, he de-

picts a door that would be considered as standard for Arnold Schwarzenegger's build or Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion if it was inhabited by Jabba the Hutt. His last steps consider an 'ideal' magazine house, transformed in order to accommodate the anatomical standards of various characters such as Oscar Pistorius, Borg Queen or David Toole.

To conclude, we can say that the elaboration of an architecture based on the consideration of an ideal normalized body is dangerous, as this architecture will not only be discriminatory but will also force any body to physically tend towards this normalized body. Conceived this way, architecture becomes a machine engaging normative processes, both in its users' imaginary and in an anatomical action — similarly to a garden stake for a plant — as the body always attempts to adapt to its direct environment. The only universality that we can allow ourselves to use as a creative vector is one that applies indifferently to every body and therefore constitutes a legitimate standard. Projects that ignore this question participate in the process of normalization; in consequence, we have to create subversive apparatuses that allows the anomaly — that is everybody to some extent — to express itself in resistance to architecture's violence on the body.

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Originally published on April 29th 2012

09

THE COUNTER-BIOPOLITICAL BIOSCLEAVE EXPERIMENT AS IMAGINED BY STANLEY SHOSTAK

[also in *The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 2: FOUCAULT*]

A whole issue of the Canada based journal *iNFLExions* — including a playful and beautiful digital interface — was recently dedicated to the work of Arakawa and Madeline Gins, thus giving access to about thirty texts written by various intellectual figures interested in the production of the *Reversible Destiny* Foundation. Among them, there is Stanley Shostak, a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh and author of two books about death and immortality at the biological level (*Becoming Immortal*, 2002 & *The Evolution of Death*, 2006). In his text, *Bioscleave: Shaping our Biological Niches*, he examines Arakawa and Gins' manifesto "We Have Decided Not To Die" and one of its architectural embodiments, the Bioscleave House (see photograph on the pages 76-77) as a form of resistance against biopolitics.

Stanley Shostak, who considers Arakawa and Gins' thesis with the scientific rigor that his background implies, starts his text with the process that the Bioscleave House should follow if it were an operative drug to extend life expectancy and had to be recognized by the medical industry and its institutions (EMA for Europe, FDA for the United States).

His narrative involves various steps of experiments on bodies that would be subjected to daily life in the house. The care taken by Arakawa and Gins to solve every architectural detail to serve their manifesto — not only the terrain itself but also all the other procedures involved, including color, furniture etc.— could then serve its purpose and be used as an experimental apparatus to show whether it is actually operative or not.

Shostak is not simply interested in considering the Bioscleave House as a sort of drug; rather, he sees the house and the way of life it implies as an active form of resistance to biopolitical cogs in which our bodies are involved. Foucault defines biopolitics as the organization and supervision of life — both at the biological and anatomical level — as a form of control of the bodies subjugated to a given sovereignty. We can also refer to Preciado's thesis that interprets biopolitics within what she calls a *pharmacopornographic* society, for which the paradigmatic object/architecture is the contraceptive pill: a self-inflicted modification of the body's biology with societal birth regulation consequences. Shostak's text presents the Bioscleave House as the opposite of such a biopolitical apparatus: a *dispositif* in which the body does not need to be troubled in its biology, but rather is strengthened and stimulated in its biological and anatomical construction. In other words, and to use the Spinozist terminology to which I always come back when writing about Arakawa and Gins's work: an "architecture of joy" (i.e. that increases the body's potential) rather than one that implements sad passions.

BIOSCLEAVE: SHAPING OUR BIOLOGICAL NICHES /// **by Stanley Shostak**

Our lives are blighted by biopolitics masquerading as environmentalism—by organized power

over life focused on ... the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary (Foucault, 1980: 139).

Fortunately, an artist and a poet have created a shelter from biopolitics in Bioscleave House and provided an inspiration to live in real time. Of course, biopoliticians grumble that claims made for Bioscleave House are unscientific, anecdotal, and lack controls. But scientific studies in public health and disease management are frequently heuristic, beginning with anecdotal evidence—with exploratory studies—and 150,000 years of human evolution have provided all the controls one needs!

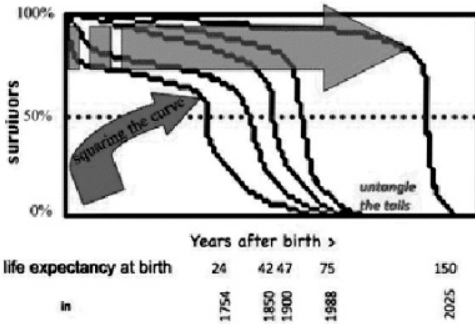
In any event, if Bioscleave House were a drug assessed under the protocols of regulatory agencies (e.g., the FDA in the US or EMEA in the EU), it would already have passed Phase 0—that human beings process the drug and the drug works in the human being as expected. It would be time to move on to Phase I in earnest! In Phase I, Bioscleave House would be tested on a small number of healthy volunteers to see if objectives are validated by results. Phase II would test Bioscleave House's impact on wellbeing and longevity in a larger number of volunteers drawn from an enlarged pool of possible subjects. Finally, having demonstrated that Bioscleave House works as intended, it would be ready for Phase III, multicenter trials on large groups for long durations aimed at the definitive assessment of effectiveness in comparison with the current "gold standard," namely life as we know it—shaped by biopolitics. At this point, Arakawa and Gins would submit applications to the regulatory agencies that would permit volunteers to obtain Bioscleave Houses inde-

pendently. Finally, during Post Marketing Surveillance Trials (i.e., Phase IV), the label would be expanded to incorporate additional evidence for the Bioscleave House efficacy in individuals not included in the population for which Bioscleave House was originally approved for marketing.

Of course, this scenario would raise hackles among those living by the dictates and standards of biopolitics. Biopolitics supports “anti-aging” medicine whereas Bioscleave House is “pro-aging” without medicine. Aging is a problem for biopolitics but not for Arakawa and Gins. Rather, living fully at every age is the problem they confront. Biopolitics would have increasing numbers of human beings living fragile and vulnerable lives as nonagenarians, centenarians, and supercentenarians. Bioscleave House employs biotopology to extend vigorous life throughout prolonged adulthood. Biopoliticians make metaphysical claims for imminent and permanent cures of disease associated with aging while Bioscleave House espouses human enhancement and the evolution of vigorous life, promoting healthy living now and in generations to come.

The difference between biopolitics and biotopology is easily illustrated. The image below shows five survivorship curves, also known as human life expectancy curves, tracing the percentage of individuals (‘survivors’) alive in a cohort as they age (‘years after birth’). The four curves toward the left are based on data for people in the United States and Europe, actuarial extrapolations, and smoothing algorithms. The one curve at the right is based entirely on projections. The four data-based curves represent cohorts of individuals born respectively in 1754, 1850, 1900, and 1988; the fifth curve is for an entirely hypothetical cohort of individuals to be born in 2025.

Life expectancy: survivors/year



1/3/20

1.

The curves all begin at 100%, when all members of the cohort are alive, and end at 0%, when all members of the cohort are dead. A plateau is reached in each curve during adult life followed by a period of rapid decline when survivorship drops off precipitously until moderating and approaching zero asymptotically in old age.

Several important points emerge from seeing the four data-based curves together. The first point is that the four curves follow a similar pattern where a more or less horizontal arm meets a more or less vertical arm. The second point is that the more or less horizontal arms move upward and lengthen while the more or less vertical arms become increasingly upright. The third point is that the “tails” of the four curves overlap (i.e., are entangled) as they approach 0, at the bottom of the graph. As a result, the shape of the curves changes from somewhat rounder on the left to somewhat squarer on the right. This effect, called “squaring the curve,” is attributed by biopoliticians to improvements in health care management.

Thus, the more horizontal portions of the curves have risen and flattened due to improvements in pre- and post-natal care of women, neonatal care, vaccination, and treatment of infectious diseases among the young. Consequently more babies have survived to become juveniles and more preadolescents have advanced into adulthood¹. Simultaneously, the more vertical portion of the curve is pushed to the right by the increased numbers of young people surviving into adulthood and by middle-aged people surviving longer. These changes are generally attributed to reductions in exposure to hazards such as those in polluted air, water, and cigarette smoke, and to increased time available to individuals for rest, allowing their bodies to recuperate from the daily assaults of normal life, especially those suffered at work. In addition, survival is promoted by improved treatment of chronic disease—although the rampant epidemics of obesity and type II diabetes suggest we are not doing everything we should be doing to combat chronic disease.

How many years have been added to human life as a result of squaring the curve? With a little coaxing this question is answered with numbers generated from these curves. The dotted horizontal line bisecting each curve at 50% (i.e., at the point where half the people in each cohort are alive and half the people are dead) assigns a “life expectancy at birth” value to each cohort. “Life expectancy at birth” is considered a cohort’s mean age at death and is used as a basis for statistical analysis and comparison. Thus, the 42 and 47 years life expectancies at birth for the 1850 and 1900 cohorts are significantly greater than the 24-year life expectancy at birth for the 1754 cohort, and the 75 years life expectancy at birth for the 1988 cohort is significantly greater than the life expectancies at birth for the earlier cohorts.

¹ Regrettably, not everyone is doing as well. In fact, 25% of global deaths are still due to infectious diseases striking disproportionately at the young. Even in the United States, the young may not have access to adequate health care.

In other words, for nearly two and a half centuries, mean life expectancies in the U.S. and Europe have moved up with statistical regularity. Life expectancy is higher in Iceland and Japan, and lower elsewhere in Africa and Russia.

But this is the limit of 'squaring.' Indeed, squaring the curve has only a few more years to go before it is squared to saturation! If biopolitics is allowed to continue on its present trajectory, projected life expectancies will increase for white women born in 2100 to 102 years of age, black women and white men to 97, and black men to 90. Even if the conquest of diseases is complete by 2200 as projected by biopoliticians, life expectancy at birth would be 117 years for white women, 112 for black women and white men, and 105 for black men in the US (Olshansky, et al., 1990). This is all that biopolitics has to offer.

The problem for biopolitics arises from the 'entangled tails' as survivorship curves approach 0. This entanglement puts a damper on pushing the curves further outward, even with all the power of modern industrialized society lined up behind biopolitics. According to biopoliticians, human beings have a genetically built-in tendency to die sometime before or around 92 years of age.² Humans are supposed to hit a biological wall — a genetic barrier — during the entangled tail phase of the life expectancy curves. According to biopoliticians, during this phase, our probability of surviving from year to year is about 50%. This is not to say that the life of nonagenarians, centenarians, and supercentenarians is necessarily one of decrepitude, but it is a life of chance: the chance of someone sneezing nearby and your catching a cold, flu, or pneumonia that will kill you; of vulnerability to

² The fact that Jeanne Louise Calment made it to 122 years and 164 days (born February 21, 1875; died August 4, 1997), surviving two standard deviations beyond the mean for her cohort (a highly significant difference) is simply dismissed as a statistical fluke.

environmental hazards from which you would have walked away earlier in life but that now trip you up; and frailty to conditions, like smog, that earlier might have caused annoyance but now threatens to lay you out.

By squaring the curve, the biopoliticians have painted themselves into the proverbial corner. But what about Arakawa and Gins? What does *Reversible Destiny*, biotopology, and Bioscleave House have to say about life's limits?

"What limits?"

Biotopology has the potential to extend longevity by disentangling the tails of the survivorship curves. By strengthening the individual, Arakawa and Gins' creation holds the promise of raising the probability of living well beyond a 50% chance.

L. Steven Coles, co-founder of the Los Angeles Gerontology Research Group, created the fifth curve in the illustration (above) by untangling the tails of the survivorship curves and placing the vertical portion's point of inflection at 150 years, but it could be placed virtually anywhere along the continuum. Steve has in mind extending human lifetime by finding ways of expressing salubrious genetic tendencies, thereby promoting wellbeing and longevity (personal communication), but he also shares the vision of the creators of Bioscleave House.

Bioscleave House enhances wellbeing by activating and exercising every part of the human organism constantly and productively. By incorporating the contours of a terrain into the contours of an apartment, Bioscleave House flows into a landscape, between rooms, even within rooms, producing an expansive effect in place of the prison cell of four walls and doors. The residents breathe more deeply as their ho-

rizon expands, exercise their whole body more completely as they move in the interior terrain, and encounter their own artistic spirit as they break away into the “exploratorian” from the quotidian.

But Bioscleave House can also operate on another level by promoting the extension of human longevity through evolution. Once Bioscleave House goes beyond Phase IV and villages of Bioscleave Houses become universal, they will expand life expectancy on the level of the species. Just as Bioscleave House rejects the biopolitical imperative to die, a world of Bioscleave Houses will liberate life from ‘squaring the curve.’ A world of Bioscleave Houses will open lifetime extension to infinite possibilities.

Arakawa and Gins have shown us how to take control of our destiny and human evolution! It is simply a matter of scale. Enhancing human life will also promote the outward evolution of longevity. Biologists call it “niche construction”: how the activities of organisms bring about changes in their environments and, consequently, in their own evolution—how a species’ activity feeds back on the species’ environment and hence on its evolution.

Bioscleave House is how we can extend life throughout our species and make it worth living in the process, namely, how we can live longer by living younger! Actually, the process is not new: it is probably responsible for many of the traits that have evolved over the millennia, including our present relatively long life. Juvenilisation, known in the evolutionary literature as “neoteny” (from Greek, meaning stretching, extending or holding onto) refers to the retention of juvenile morphology into adult stages of the lifetime, and hence the delay of aging.

Signs of neoteny are clearly visible in humans. Several aspects of the human body strongly remind zoologists of characteristics typical among young, immature, even embryonic forms of primates. Among these are the size of the brain, which is very large in comparison to the rest of the body (like an infant's), the angle of head to spine (a right angle), and a mostly hairless body (Benecke 2002:105). Neoteny is the slowing of somatic development, epitomized by the amphibian mud puppy *Necturus maculosus*, which retains its larval appearance throughout adult life. But neoteny also occurs widely in other vertebrates, fish, birds, and mammals, and—notably—in humans.

Slow growth is reflected in the delayed age of puberty in women compared to other mammals³. Moreover, women experiencing a delay in reaching menopause have not only grown old more slowly than other women but they tend to be longer-lived (Perls et al., 1997). Our aging is also slow compared to aging in other primates. The baboon mortality rate doubles every four years compared to seven to eight years for humans. “[Thus, h]umans. . . age differently, and more slowly than baboons” (Tatar et al. 2009). The pioneering primatologist Sherwood Washburn insists “there is strong direct evidence for the slowing of [human] development” (Washburn 1981: 23).

Furthermore, “[w]hat characterizes modern humans as unique is a prolongation of the postnatal growth period” (Dean 1987: 213). Indeed,

[t]he ages derived for *Australopithecus*, *Paranthropus*, and early *Homo* described biological equivalence to modern man at roughly two-thirds the chronological age, demonstrating that

3 “Human beings reach puberty at an age (12–14 years) that is [relatively] 75-fold later than in mice” (Finch 1990: 629).

they had growth periods similar to the modern great apes. (Bromage and Dean 1985: 526)

At the end of growth, the adult skull in humans reaches an allometric shape (size-related shape) which is equivalent to that of juvenile chimpanzees with no permanent teeth. (Penin et al. 2002: 50)

Neoteny has other effects: it extends the benefits of juvenile life into adult stages. Juvenilised human beings are healthier, more active, livelier, and more receptive to new ideas than other members of the species. Indeed, one is hardly surprised when the biographers of the French supercentenarian Jeanne Calment describe her at 120 years as “someone who remains very young in spirit, and tastes, a kind of kid, almost childlike at times” (Allard et al. 1998: 62).

And Bioscleave House will only be the tip of the evolutionary iceberg by promoting neoteny and pushing juvenile wellbeing into adulthood. We have yet to conceive of where Bioscleave House will take us by returning us to the sand box of youthful life where life is play, sex is fun, commodities do no harm, creativity expands without leaving waste and where poetry thrives without breeding despair! That is where niche construction will create our future in the here-and-now! Genes will be reshuffled over generations and selection will favor a new, youthful, long-lived *Homo sapiens*. We will evolve into a species of individuals living younger, living longer and enjoying life all the more. Biotopologists—scientists, poets, artists, architects—will thrive in their Bioscleave Houses forging ahead into appropriate niche construction for *Reversible Destiny*, enhanced neoteny, and the evolution of youthful longevity for a lifetime!

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FUNAMBULIST PAPER #35 / DIY BIOPOLITICS: THE DEREGULATED SELF BY RUSSELL HUGHES

[also in *The Funambulist Papers: Volume 1 (Punctum, 2013)*]

Today's guest writer is Russell Hughes who recently finished his dissertation, *DIY Biopolitics: The Deregulated Self at the RMIT* (Melbourne) and, while waiting for its publication, shares with us one of its chapter where he introduces a philosophical interpretation of the work of artists/poets/philosophers/architects Arakawa and Madeline Gins. Russell starts his analysis with the paintings created in the 1960's and 1970's and follows with the examination of their architecture.

DIY BIOPOLITICS: THE DEREGULATED SELF /// **by Russell Hughes**

Arakawa's early paintings (1961-73) (many of which were produced with Gins, though she took no authorial credit for them) represent what appear to be semi finished sketches that sometimes look like technical drawings against backgrounds of white and varying shades of brown. The purpose of these two dimensional representations is to signify 'blankness' as a "neutral positing," in the sense that blank is a 'holding open' of the compulsion toward the standard artistic practice of conceptual and cognitive colonisation toward

a predetermined end.¹ As they state: “it is what is there but undifferentiated, so it is nothing ... It is what fills emptiness.”² Another way of understanding blank is through the French blanc, meaning white, which is of course the congealing of all the colors in the spectrum (as opposed to black, the absence of color). In this sense, blank (or blanc) is overabundance, the reservoir of potentiality from which anything can come forth. The concept of blank draws our attention to the multiple points of interpretation contained within open-endedness, as opposed to the definitive teleological fixity for which strives and to which is accustomed much (not all) creative practice. The visual argument in these artworks is that painting abstracts from nature, narrowing down and essentializing experience. Abstract thought is the frame that apprehends the open-endedness of meaning, defining and positioning a text in exclusive, unequivocal terms. In this respect, much of Arakawa’s early work remains untitled (acting as the actual title of the work), which itself is an act of resistance to the etymological determinism that comes with labels that posit in explicit terms what it is we are meant to understand and experience from artistic productions.

Arakawa’s paintings function as possibilities for reconstruction, involving “not so much the play of sensibilities as they do the experience of reflection.”³ In this way Arakawa (and Gins) want to problematise how we “speak and enquire about what we hold as knowledge, especially visual knowledge.”⁴ The blankness produced in these works is not so much about nothing or non-sense, as it is about the ‘charged potentiality’ that becomes apparent when our intentions of the way we read texts are questioned, confused and disorientated.

1 Arakawa and Madeline Gins, *Reversible Destiny: We Have Decided Not to Die*. New York: Abrams Inc, 1997.

2 Ibid.

3 Craig Adcock, *The Meaning of Blank in Arakawa's Early Work*. *Interfaces: Image, Text, Language*, 1(21-22), 2003. 203-215.

4 Ibid., 1.

A central key to Arakawa's work and his subsequent architectural productions that operate along similar lines is the frustration of the expectation of predetermination in the consumption of texts, which forces into play a series of openings between the text and our cognition of it. In this sense blank operates as a middle way or *entredoux*, an opening of the circular loop between experience and reflection. Crucially, Arakawa (and Gins) paintings do not so much conflate painting and experience, or operate in the gap between them, as respond to their dynamic reciprocity.

As a device for short-circuiting cognitive and conceptual processes, Arakawa (and Gins) use blankness as the platform from which the possibility for cognitive and conceptual liberation is launched. But as you may have noted in this last sentence, these two dimensional representations are specific to a liberation predicated on visual experience alone. Though Arakawa (and Gins) larger canvases do engage the body to a degree (some experience a feeling of vertigo standing before the larger canvasses), it is from this need to concentrate on the body, to target its receptive centers in their entirety (as the 'bottom up' spontaneously emergent cognitive hypothesis, the theory that transformative cognitive potential is accessed by targeting the body's sensorium in its entirety, dictates), that the two dimensional artist and his poetic partner turn to architecture.

By translating these principles from two to three dimensions, Arakawa and Gins' theoretical trajectory works toward a more comprehensive engagement of the cognised body within a tactile, tangibly embedded, 'sensorially' charged space. In this sense, is what they call 'tactically posed' architecture challenges, interrogates, frustrates and disrupts the predetermined, habitual, sedentary practices of modern living, destabilizing and de-habituating the teleologically driven end

points that govern it.

To illustrate this point architecturally, consider what is actually wrong with normative architectural practice. It is argued by several theorists (Bergson, Poincaré, Rosenberg), that human cognitive freedom became lost with the imposition of a Newtonian grid of time and space onto experience.⁵ This occurred with the appearance of technologies of clock time and calculus utilised by governments to regulate and control human and social behavior. Such a condition extends to the domain of architecture, in particular contemporary architecture, which Arakawa and Gins argue ignores much of its primary function, to be first and foremost at the service of the body. Contemporary architecture is “insufficiently procedural,” that is, it is ‘comfort’ architecture that presupposes identity and fails to ask much of the body (the embodied mind).⁶ Still laden with the latent architectural heritage of buildings as monuments or mausoleums, as ‘tombs for the dead’, much of popular contemporary architecture abstracts, and thus detracts, from the open-ended potential claimed in the embodied mind hypothesis, once again narrowing down and essentialising experience. Philosopher Joel Robinson makes a poignant observation of contemporary architectural practice in this regard:

Investing spaces with architectural procedures for asking how we constitute ourselves in the world, Arakawa and Gins’ architecture aims to empower us to stretch the limits of sensorial plasticity. Their work thus stands in opposition to smart homes that, as second skins that are becoming increasingly self-regulating and inter-

5 Martin Rosenberg, *Constructing Autopoiesis: The Architectural Body in the Light of Contemporary Cognitive Science. Interfaces: Image, Text, Language.* 1(21-22), 2003. 171-189.

6 Madeline Gins & Arakawa, Shusaku, *Architectural Body.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002.

active, make their user inhabitants proportionately dumber. It also stands in contrast to those coffins (as Gibson calls them in *Neuromancer*) that numb the senses to everyday dwelling, and against the celebration of virtual architectures and obsolescent bodies ... theirs is a tool for re-configuring ... reforming ... and reengineering.⁷

The smart home, through the satiation of pleasure and comfort, through solving every dimension of experience to create a problem-less mode of living, kneads and coaxes the user inhabitant into a numbed state, an architecture that Jean Baudrillard in a different context (consumer society) calls an environment of “seduction” and sedation that domesticates and sublimates its user inhabitants into becoming just another object for consumption (1988). In this way, standard architectural practice is not dissimilar from the model of “learned helplessness” as it is understood in behavioral psychology.⁸ Arakawa and Gins’ surrounds work as the antithesis to this kind of architectural logic. Through the deployment of procedural tools that confuse, disorientate and question the body’s relationship to its surrounds, their spaces produce effects that are tentative and highly uncertain, inducing a sense of open ended possibility which works to resist all compulsions toward habit, routine, acceptance, inevitability, and any other kind of corporeal or conceptual predetermination.

Drawing on metaphorical descriptions of the way the architecture can bring a greater intimacy between humans and their environment, Arakawa and Gins employ the example of the snail to illustrate the way architecture can increase its proximity to the body, so that to wear it is like dressing oneself

7 Joel Robinson, *From Clockwork Bodies to Reversible Destinies (On the Architectural Experiments of Arakawa and Gins)*. *Art Papers*, 29(2), 2005. 34-39.

8 Martin Seligman, *Helplessness: On Depression, Development and Death*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1975.

in a second, third, fourth and counting skin. A more accessible way of understanding the nature of this intimate structural coupling between an organism and its environment, is Andy Clarke's description of the fluid dynamics of certain fish. In his book *Being There: Putting Brain, Body and World Together Again*, Clarke uses the 'Tale of the Tuna' to describe the way some fish appear to defy the laws of physics in their capacity for propulsion and maneuverability.⁹ The argument begins with the illogic that dolphins are simply not strong enough to propel themselves at the speeds to which they do. According to the Triantafyllou brothers the extraordinary swimming efficiency of certain fishes is due to an "evolved capacity to exploit and create additional forces of kinetic energy in the watery environment. Such fishes, it seems, exploit aquatic swirls, eddies, vortices and pressure gradients, in turn using them to support speedy and agile behavior."¹⁰

Here the organism in question has such a sophisticated evolutionary intimacy with the environment that produces it that its capacity for swimming defies the 'laws' of its perceived biomechanical limitation. This talent is predicated on its tentative 'at the ready' monitoring and massaging of the fluid dynamics at any given point in time, that changes with each distribution of time and space in accordance with every new set of parameters that define its situation. Responding to minute changes as they happen, summoning all it can in the cognising of each specific point in time without the encumbering 'guidance' of teleologically determined end points (the abstracted 'human' goals of reflection severed from experience), is what Arakawa and Gins are suggesting we do via the construction of architectural procedures tailored specifically to such biomechanical 'law' defying possibilities inherent within the dormant cognitive potentials of the body.

9 Andy Clarke, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body and World Together Again*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998.

10 Ibid.

This raises the essential point to be made with respect to the heuristic trajectory of Arakawa and Gins and the foundational assumptions of the discipline of cognitive science. In the opening lines of *Architectural Body*, Gins and Arakawa state the need to recognise ourselves (and the species from which we emanate) as “puzzle creatures”:

“Who or what are we as this species? Puzzle creatures to ourselves, we are visitations of inexplicability ... We must surely go to all possible lengths to find out what we exist in regard to.”¹¹

Contrary to the common practice of solving in concrete terms this ontological mystery, Arakawa and Gins do not seek to redress this with the positing of an abstract scheme or knowledge with which to overcome and ‘know’ it; rather, it is the very uncertainty of our being that Arakawa and Gins embrace as the definitive guiding principle for an architecture that must avoid stasis and the teleological determinisms that encumber it, if it is to engage experience as it happens and yield the dynamic cognitive potential contained therein. Resonant with the findings of cybernetic information theory, principally the research of Norbert Wiener illustrated in Chapters 1 and 4, Arakawa and Gins’ architectural procedures, predicated as they are on the notion that the species is a “puzzle creature” to itself, recasts their vision for the species from this contradictory ‘platform’ of uncertainty. For cognitive science practitioners, Arakawa and Gins’ architectural and heuristic practice is thus vital if not indispensable to the ability to renegotiate and recast cognitive bodies toward the transformative potentials contained within the emergent cognitive hypothesis.

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Originally published on October 20th 2012

¹¹ Ibid., 6.



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LETTER FROM JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD TO ARAKAWA AND MADELINE GINS

LETTER FROM JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD ///
Translated from the French by Stephen Sartarelli.
Arakawa and Madeline Gins, *Reversible Destiny: We*
***Have Decided Not to Die*. New York: Abrams Inc, 1997.**

Dear Friends,

Could one perhaps call your antide destiny architecture “antibiography”?

Would the distribution of time between beginning and end be neutralized?

Would the possibilities reserved for childhood remain open in every circumstance? Might they even multiply? Could the body be younger at sixty years of age than at fifteen?

The body would no longer inhabit a dwelling that grew old along with it. It would no longer inhabit a dwelling that grew old along with it. It would no longer be dedicated to adapting itself to constant volumes –a door here, a chair there, an ear here, a pair of knees there. Would space begin anew each day?

Instantaneous habits would come and go. Affectionately, energetically. Would architecture summon energy and affection to inhabit the body?

Would it be futile to build concepts? Could one write or draw through encounters? Straight from nothingness?

The three children playing hide-and-seek in this house as I ask you these questions reverse the destinies of the beds, the tables, the rooms, ignoring the assigned purposes of each. Laughter, shouts, silence, vehemence, foot-stamping, breathlessness –is this, in fact, similar to the task your architecture expects of us, dear Madeline, dear Arakawa?

Jean-François Lyotard
January 1st 1997

Illustrations are drawings by Arakawa and Madeline Gins for Elliptical Field - Yoro Park.

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Originally published on April 24th 2011

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ARCHITECTURES FOR NON-DYING CREATURES: THE ARTISTIC-PHILOSOPHICAL-POETIC-ARCHITECTURAL WORK OF ARAKAWA AND GINS

ARTICLE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN FOR DAMn MAGAZINE (February 2014) ///

On January 8, 2014, American artist-philosopher-poet-architect Madeline Gins died after a long fight against cancer, three and a half years after her husband and partner Arakawa. They had dedicated their five-decade artistic, philosophical, poetic, and architectural work to the struggle against death. This powerful manifesto was often misunderstood as a wish for immortality. Such an interpretation misses the fundamental point of Arakawa and Gins's work that I propose to expose here in my own words, based on the numerous conversations I had with Gins in the last three years.

Our common experience of death consists in the death of others. Marcel Duchamp's grave in Rouen has an inscription, "it is always others who die" (Duchamp was Arakawa's mentor). Death is thus something 'from the outside' and we interpret it like an event: someone is alive and then, one day,

this person is dead. In 1800, however, French physiologist and biologist Xavier Bichat writes that “life is the ensemble of functions that resist death.” Thinking of life and death in these terms consists in a complete inversion of the way they used to be thought and the way they are still commonly thought today. Death is no longer an event, it is a process; and life is no longer a given, it is a constructive process of resistance. We cannot help but notice that we do not all die at the same age; it therefore demonstrates that this process can affect us at different speeds.

Understood in these terms, the action of “not-dying” celebrated by Arakawa and Gins does not equal an illusory experience of immortality, but rather the minimization of the death’s effect on a body at a given moment; that is, the maximal deceleration of the death process. Their architecture is therefore entirely dedicated to the production of “not-dying” actions. Such an ambition is reached through the application of what they name “architectural procedures.” Their names can sometimes appear obscure as they refuse to use an already philosophically connoted terminology; however, it is easy to summarize them through their smallest common denominator: the will to increase the body’s awareness and understanding of its architectural surrounds as well as its own biological composition.

Arakawa, Gins and their office, the Reversible Destiny Foundation have built five of many architectural projects they designed:

- Ubiquitous Site in Nagi (Japan): a monumental cylindrical architectural environment where the elements of the floor find their symmetry on the ceiling.
- Elliptical Field - Site of Reversible Destiny in Yoro (Japan): a two-hectare artificial park incorporating numerous pavilions

and playgrounds.

- Reversible Destiny Lofts – In Memory of Helen Keller in Mitaka (Japan): a collective housing building presenting nine single-family apartments.
- Bioscleave House – Lifespan Extending Villa in East Hamptons (USA): a 250 square-meter house which main room is characterized by a strong hilly concrete terrain.
- Biotopological Scale-Juggling Escalator in New York: a permanent stair-installation designed for Comme des Garçons Dover Street Market.

When looking at the photographs that illustrate this article, one immediately notes some of the architectural procedures mentioned above, while others can only be experienced when inhabiting these spaces. The most obvious procedure consists is the surface with which the body is in contact. The material assemblage created by the body in relation to its architectural surround is what Arakawa and Gins simply call “architectural body.” This way of considering this relation is useful to think of what 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza calls “the reciprocity of affects.” It means that not only architecture affects the body, but that the body also affects architecture. Spinoza’s ethics calls for two consistent material assemblages like a body and an architecture to develop harmonious encounters between their part in contact. Spinoza calls this harmony “joy,” in opposition to harmful violent encounters that he calls “sad.” Joy is what contributes in each assemblage (body, object etc.) to make “the effort to persevere in its being,” that we can associate to Bichat’s definition of life and Arakawa and Gin’s definition of “not-dying.”

Despite what we may think at first, the idea of comfort is not linked in any way to the Spinozian concept of joy. Joy needs to be conquered; it requires for the body to try to understand “what it can do” and how it interacts with the material world.

Although Spinoza was a prime philosophical reference for Gins and Arakawa, their architectures constitute the most expressive examples of spaces that are made in the sole goal to orchestrate as many joyful relations between the body and architecture as possible. The *Reversible Destiny* Foundation in New York and Tokyo will continue to carry forward their legacy.

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“ALL MEN ARE SISTERS”: A JOY NAMED MADELINE GINS

This is not an obituary.

Since yesterday morning Madeline Gins is no longer fighting against death; she finally embraced its entropic forces and her body will soon disperse in the “bioscleave,” a word Arakawa and Gins invented to describe the unfathomable forces at work in the material world. This platform is not an appropriate place for emotions, not even for those felt for a dear friend and inspirational mentor. This is why I would rather celebrate the joy that was named Madeline Gins by, once again, writing about her work instead. Punctuating death is still to misinterpret it into an event; it was at work all-along, life — and what a life! — was the creativity resisting it.

Before exploring Gins’s writings, I would like to include the short transcript of a recent recording that I made of her for what she calls “the *Reversible Destiny* Declaration”:

Our species has made a declaration. Let us call this the Reversible Destiny Declaration. We will not just take it anymore. We will no longer throw ourselves into the mortality waste-baskets. Shall we put in the following gentle but firm way. Oh



yes we shall! Enough is enough. We have decided not to die. And how do we go about doing this? Through architectural procedures, made explicitly to help us reconfigure ourselves. If you do not yet know what an architectural procedure is, you will know soon. Start with this declaration, and never back away from it: we have decided not to die. (November 22, 2013)

In 1984, after the publication of Gins's second solo book *What the President Will Say and Do!* (Station Hill, 1984, also accessible online here) John Cage stated that "any man, woman, or child who intends to lead itself into presidency should get a copy, reading it before taking any further steps." This book is another proof if needed that poetry is not a category, but rather a language. Following (knowingly or not) 18th-century feminist Olympe de Gouges and her 1791 *Déclaration des droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne* (Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Female Citizen), she included in this book a chapter entitled "All Men Are Sisters":

One thing men haven't realized is that unlike them (all men are mortal), women do not die — This makes all the difference — although some women, having been brow-beaten by sheer syllogistic brawn, have at times pretended.

Most women do not look like themselves; although many women do assume the form of "woman;" some are men, others gas and electricity, and still others are indistinguishable. (Madeline Gins, *What the President Will Say and Do!*, New York: Station Hill, 1984).

Gins' wink at Simone de Beauvoir in the first sentence — *All*

Men Are Mortal is the name of a 1946 book written by de Beauvoir — enables us to think of de Beauvoir’s well-known phrase that “one is not born a woman but becomes one.” What Gins brings to de Beauvoir’s statement is an acute sense of corporeality. One does not just become a woman, one — that means, a body — has to “assume the form of ‘woman’.” Forms constitute the semiotic recognized by the norm in its categorization of the bodies: “this one is a man, this one is a woman...,” but they also stand for the material assemblage that a body — or “gas and electricity” — can construct in a manifesto against this norm.

We find this opposition to the normative processes in a later book written by Gins: *Helen Keller or Arakawa* (Burning Books, 1994). Helen Keller is the paradigmatic body — of course, paradigms create new norms — to whom Arakawa and Gins’s architecture is addressed, in particular the Mitaka Lofts in Tokyo whose full name is “*Reversible Destiny* Lofts – In Memory of Helen Keller.” Keller could not see nor hear, two body characteristics considered by the norm as highly disabling, but why exactly? The very concept of disability can only exist if the concept of ability also exists. That means a given society is organized according to normatively considered “able bodies”:

I find nothing I perceive to be essentially invisible. In a world of all blind people, everything would be non-visible, and it would be trivial to point out one thing or another as being so. To the blind, terms like “invisible” are but polite bridges (with much torque and of odd construction) to the sighted; curtesy, and say, yes ,ma’am. When I’m not speaking in the other’s voice, I perceive things directly, fielding them as best as I can. (Madeline Gins, *Helen Keller or Arakawa*, New

York: Burning Books, 1995, 2.)

It is common to say that the “blind” — a category based upon a supposed lack — develop a more acute sense of hearing in order to “survive” in the world. This constitutes a very simplified understanding of how a non-seeing body operates, a simple transfer of intensity of one understandable sense to another. What Gins describes through the person of Keller, however, is more complex:

Nevertheless, a having once been marked with the condition of invisibility goes so far — so far-going has it been in this marked vessel as to have completely spread through me — as to lead to where it began: myself unseen. Here’s the sum of all of that (and soundless!), plus a whole other set of X’s, hidden. As the provisional sum of all of these, I direct the traffic of weightedly perceptible “invisibles” from a within. The nearly perceptible is thoroughly perceptible enough to me. I have never been able to find the cut-off points for this within. Rather, this “within” acts as if it were boundlessly stretching out — if one were to include the full spread of all the ripples and rippings — into a distance ambiguously endless.

Of course, actions taken by me have a great deal to do with how this distance forms. More than fifty regular actions and easily the same number of micro-actions determine enveloping and the tissues of density near and far on which this depends.

And this is the way I do inhabit the non-visible;

as a stretched-out mass onto which the layout of the world is to be placed to be remembered. The “living canvas” is not a bad nickname for someone who strives to keep track of things the way I do. Distinct spots tell of themselves proprioceptively or kinaesthetically. What’s happening within my right shoulder is two and one-quarter feet distant from what goes on within the left one. One moment’s spot is another moment’s distance. I situate things and events by means of these. Spots, areas, distance expand and reduce to become one another, occasionally without my knowing it. I have what’s happening within my left shoulder cleaving slightly less than two and one-quarter feet distant from those events peculiar to my right one. I keep these two shoulders separate and at the distance from each other that they, by nature, by the nature of (my) body, deserve to be; only when I’m forced to move exceedingly fast — to go as swift as a bullet — do I allow them to be given as a single dot of a place named shoulder. (Madeline Gins, *Helen Keller or Arakawa*, New York: Burning Books, 1995, 3-4.)

Since, as noted numerous times on The Funambulist blog, we still have a very poor knowledge to the Spinozist question, “what can a body do,” the entire artificiality of the norm appears clearly when it distributes grades of ability. This is why the work of Arakawa and Gins remains highly political, it takes as a predicate this ignorance and, from it, builds a more acute understanding of what a body can do, while the norm pretends it knows what a body can’t do in order to organize the bodies that compose a society.

The joy named Madeline Gins does not form a body that composes this society; her and Arakawa's five-decades long work remains for us to carry forward this joy.

Photograph of Madeline Gins and Joke Post by Momoyo Homma at the opening of the *Topological Scale-Juggling* Escalator for Comme Des Garcons (December 2013).

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ABOUT

THE FUNAMBULIST: a blog written and edited by Léopold Lambert. It finds its name in the consideration for architecture's representative medium, the line, and its philosophical and political power when it materializes and subjectivizes bodies. If the white page represents a given milieu — a desert, for example — and one (an architect, for example) comes to trace a line on it, (s)he will virtually split this same milieu into two distinct impermeable parts through its embodiment, the wall. The Funambulist, also known as a tightrope walker, is the character who, somehow, subverts this power by walking on the line.

CENTER FOR TRANSFORMATIVE MEDIA, Parsons The New School for Design: a transdisciplinary media research initiative bridging design and the social sciences, and dedicated to the exploration of the transformative potential of emerging technologies upon the foundational practices of everyday life across a range of settings.

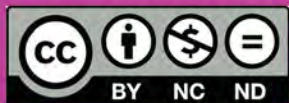
PUNCTUM BOOKS: spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion is an open-access and print-on-demand independent publisher dedicated to radically creative modes of intellectual inquiry and writing across a whimsical para-humanities assemblage. punctum books seeks to curate the open spaces of writing or writing-as-opening, the crucial tiny portals on whose capacious thresholds all writing properly and improperly takes place. Pricking, puncturing, perforating = publishing in the mode of an unconditional hospitality and friendship, making space for what Eve Sedgwick called “queer little gods” – the “ontologically intermediate and teratological figures” of y/our thought. We seek to pierce and disturb the wednesdayish, business-as-usual protocols of both the generic university studium and its individual cells or holding tanks. We also take in strays.



THE FUNAMBULIST PAMPHLETS
VOLUME 8: ARAKAWA + MADELINE GINS

The Reversible Destiny Foundation created by Arakawa and Madeline Gins is much more than an architectural practice. It articulates art, philosophy, poetry, architecture and, to some extent, science in a dialogue that benefits each of these disciplines and ultimately serves one of the most radical ideas that apply to architecture: the action of non-dying.

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